

Newnham JCR Mental Wellbeing Report

Concerns have been consistently raised about the quality of Newnham College's mental welfare provision to the JCR throughout the past year. One in four people experience a mental health condition at some point in the lives, and the pressures of a Cambridge term, in conjunction with the fact that for many students this amounts to their first experience of living away from home, compounds and exacerbates such issues. The JCR unanimously agree that the current provision for mental welfare provided for college does not sufficiently meet need or demand, and the results of this survey suggest that a counsellor would be a sound and popular move to address this serious deficit in pastoral care.

Survey Results

On 7th November, we sent out a survey on mental wellbeing to all undergraduate students. The recipients were assured that their responses would remain entirely anonymous, and we were very careful that our questions were without bias or cause for offense. We received **166 responses** in the space of two days, which demonstrates the strength of feeling on this issue.

1. **We asked: 'I have experienced problems with my mental wellbeing during my time at Cambridge'.**

The possible responses were:

- Yes
- No
- I would prefer not to say.

The results were as follows:

YES	80%
NO	13%
I WOULD PREFER NOT TO SAY	7%

That means that on average 4/5 of Newnham's undergraduate population have experienced personal problems with their mental wellbeing in their time here – showing that a support mechanism is clearly needed.

2. **We asked: 'I know someone who has experienced problems with their mental wellbeing during their time at Cambridge'.**

The possible responses were:

- Yes
- No
- I would prefer not to say.

The results were as follows:

YES	91.92%
NO	5.05%
I WOULD PREFER NOT TO SAY	3.03%

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3. **We asked: 'Newnham's current provisions for mental welfare (college nurse, chaplain, subscription to University Counselling Service, peer to peer scheme) are sufficient.'**

The possible responses were:

- Yes
- No
- I would prefer not to say.

YES	8.25%
NO	84.54%
I would prefer not to say	7.22%

4. **We asked: 'I, or someone I know, have made use of the College Nurse when I/they experienced mental welfare problems'.**

The possible responses were:

- Yes, and it helped.
- Yes, and it didn't helped.
- No
- I would prefer not to say

YES AND IT HELPED	5.15%
YES AND IT DIDN'T HELP	26.8%
NO	65.98%
I would prefer not to say	2.06%

5. **We asked, 'I, or someone I know, has/have made use of the Chaplain when I/they experienced mental welfare problems'.**

The possible responses were:

- Yes, and it helped.
- Yes, and it didn't helped.
- No
- I would prefer not to say

YES AND IT HELPED	3.09%
YES AND IT DIDN'T HELP	2.06%
NO	94.85%
I would prefer not to say	0%

6. **We asked, 'I, or someone I know, have/has made use of the University Counselling Service when I/they experienced mental welfare difficulties.'**

The possible responses were:

- Yes, and it helped.
- Yes, and it didn't helped.
- No
- I would prefer not to say
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YES AND IT HELPED	28.87%
YES AND IT DIDN'T HELP	17.53%
NO	46.39%
I would prefer not to say	7.22%

7. **We asked, 'I, or someone I know, has/have made use of the Peer to Peer support scheme when I/they experienced mental welfare difficulties.'**

The possible responses were:

- Yes, and it helped.
- Yes, and it didn't helped.
- No
- I would prefer not to say

YES AND IT HELPED	2.06%
YES AND IT DIDN'T HELP	1.03%
NO	94.85%
I would prefer not to say	2.06%

8. **We asked, 'I think Newnham would benefit from a college counsellor.'**

The possible responses were:

- Yes
- No

YES	97.92%
NO	2.08%

We then provided a space for further comment. Due to the highly personal nature of a lot of these stories, it would be a breach of confidentiality to repeat them here in full. Nonetheless, a number of points were constantly made:

- The long waiting times for the University Counselling Service are not sufficient for addressing urgent concerns
- The application process for UCS is long and intimidating
- Fear of using UCS because of perception that an individual's issue isn't important enough
- The chaplain is barely used, as students worry his services provide an inappropriately religious bent to mental health concerns
- Peer support should not be the main port of call for those suffering with mental health concerns.
- Students are reticent to use the college nurse for their mental health issues.
- Some students have absolutely no one to speak to in college when their mental wellbeing is at risk.
- The GPs at Newnham Walk Surgery are inclined to provide medication e.g. Prozac immediately, which does not address the underlying source of mental health issues.
- A college-internal counsellor would be in familiar, safe surroundings, faster and easier to access and there would be the potential for more direct contact with and speedier updates for Directors of Studies and Tutors of students concerned.
- 'Please please please get a college counsellor. It will make such a difference!'

CONCLUSIONS

The results clearly demonstrate the shortfalls in current college provision, and the urgent need for proactive change. We feel that the appointment of a counsellor would improve student wellbeing, health and academic performance. For too long, it has been left to the JCR Welfare Team to 'look out' for fellow students- yet we are not adequately trained and can no longer afford to sacrifice our own mental wellbeing when other options are not available or adequate. The statistics collected here make a clear case for urgent and immediate improvement, and coupled with the, often heartbreaking, anecdotal evidence we collected, we feel that further inaction would frankly endanger the vulnerable student population of Newnham. As such, we wholeheartedly advocate the appointment of a college counsellor.